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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BE](#) [VE](#) [CU](#) [GT](#)  
SUBJECT: VFM IBARRA DISCUSSES FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES

Classified By: Ambassador James M. Derham for reasons 1.4 (b&d).

#### Summary

1. (C) According to new Vice Foreign Minister Miguel Ibarra, the Colom Government will make a priority of maintaining productive, positive relations with the USG, and advancing toward resolution of the Belize border dispute. The GOG is considering joining Petrocaribe, but the MFA is giving close scrutiny to how Petrocaribe has worked out for other countries before making any deals. Ibarra confirmed that VP Espada will lead a delegation to Cuba Jan. 31 - Feb. 3. End Summary.

#### Border Dispute with Belize a Top Priority

2. (C) Miguel Angel Ibarra, one of three Vice Foreign Ministers of the new Colom Government, told Pol/Econ Couns January 28 that while the new government would make substantial domestic policy changes, Guatemala's foreign policy would not diverge greatly from that of the Berger Administration. The new government would try to advance toward a final settlement of the Belize border dispute, he said. Guatemala's long-standing claim on Belizean territory detracted from its otherwise excellent relations with Caribbean states, and had probably cost it a seat on the UN Security Council, which ultimately went to Panama. The GOG wants good relations with the GOB, Ibarra said, and hopes to remove this irritant to relations as soon as possible. The road would be long, however: both governments would have to submit their decision to go to binding arbitration at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague to popular referenda. The ICJ case could take years, and the two sides have not yet formally approached the ICJ. Still pending is their agreement to a "compromis" laying out precisely what it is they will ask the ICJ to address. Despite the formidable hurdles, Ibarra said, the GOG wants to get started.

#### Immigration on the Bilateral Agenda

3. (C) Openness to the world would be a lodestar of President Colom's foreign policy, Ibarra said. The MFA hoped to open a clutch of new embassies, particularly in Asia. Foreign Minister Rodas spent the last 13 years working at the System for Central American Economic Integration (SIECA), is a strong advocate of free trade, and will make a priority of regional economic integration. As has been the case in the past, the GOG attaches great importance to maintaining good

working relations with the United States, Ibarra said. The new GOG appreciates and supports the Merida Initiative. With more than a million Guatemalans living in the U.S., immigration would remain an important item on the bilateral agenda.

#### VP to Lead Delegation to Cuba

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¶4. (C) Ibarra confirmed that Vice President Espada will lead a delegation to Cuba Jan. 31 - Feb. 3. Accompanying him would be Minister of Culture Geronimo Lancerio, one of the Vice Ministers of Energy and Mines, Secretary for Food Security Rodolfo Aguilar, the Rector of San Carlos University (SCU) and the Head of SCU's Medical Department, and probably himself. VP Espada publicly stated that he hoped to meet with Fidel Castro, and to receive GOC assistance in opening Qwith Fidel Castro, and to receive GOC assistance in opening and running a new SCU medical school, which would likely be located in Totonicapan, Guatemala. Pol/Econ Couns discussed with Ibarra the undemocratic and repressive nature of the Cuban regime, and advised that the GOC tour of health care facilities would likely be of medical installations that are reserved for foreigners and communist party elites, which are not representative of the true state of Cuban health care. Ibarra said he was aware that regime handlers would likely offer a view of Cuba that is not faithful to reality, and said he wanted to accompany Vice President Espada, who has no background in international affairs, to ensure he properly understood the dynamics of the trip.

#### GOG Considering Joining Petrocaribe

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¶5. (C) Regarding Venezuela, Ibarra asserted that the Colom Government's outlook most closely resembles that of the Bachelet Government of Chile, and that Chavez's firebrand populism holds no appeal for the GOG. President Colom is, however, considering joining Petrocaribe, Ibarra said. The GOG would do so exclusively for economic benefit, and would not make political concessions to the GOV in exchange for oil. Ibarra said he and many others in the GOG had mixed feelings about Petrocaribe, and would welcome the USG's and other countries' critical analyses of the pros and cons of Petrocaribe membership. Ibarra said he planned to discuss the Dominican Republic's experience in Petrocaribe with GODR officials.

Derham